

# **Fightback**

***Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism***



## **Whale Oil leaks: Anti-politics from above**

**Miriam Pierard of the Internet Party:  
"Speaking the language of youth"**

**Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?  
The Labour Party and MANA**

**Coalition governments and real change**

**Elections and migrant-bashing:  
Full rights for migrant workers**

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## Table of Contents

- 3 Editorial
- 4 National and its right wing friends
- 7 The politics, not the dirt is the problem
- 8 Whale Oil leaks: Anti-politics from above
- 12 Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?  
The Labour Party and MANA
- 14 Hone Harawira: Burning the flag or accepting the evil
- 15 Regional Joint Statement
- 15 New Zealand state's quandary in the Asia-Pacific
- 18 Unite against poverty wages and zero-hour contracts: An interview with Heleyni Pratley
- 19 Elections and migrant-bashing: Full rights for migrant workers
- 21 Miriam Pierard of the Internet Party: "Speaking the language of youth"
- 27 Coalition governments and real change

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*Fightback* magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

This special, expanded election edition of *Fightback* magazine comes at what seems to be a turning point in the 2014 election. The shockwaves from *Dirty Politics*, Nicky Hager's exposé of the possibly corrupt relations between National Party cabinet ministers and the tabloid attack blog "Whale Oil", are still reverberating. Labour and the left opposition parties want answers; John Key is stonewalling, and even the conservative press seem to realise something has gone wrong.

Daphne Lawless' contribution discusses this in terms of "anti-politics from above" in New Zealand – a neoliberal-inspired political strategy to use smear and negativity to demoralise activists and deliberately depress voting turnout. Ben Peterson takes on the same issue as an attempted undermining of democracy itself. National lost under Don Brash in 2005 because he allowed the naked, nasty face of neoliberalism to assert itself. The project goes much more smoothly under John Key, the "relaxed" and cheerful frontman, who plays at being an "ordinary bloke" who just happened to make \$50 million in currency speculation. Meanwhile, big corporates dictate policy, and cronies and friends like Cameron Slater and Jason Ede play the politics of personal destruction.

Will Hager's revelation of the naked face of attack politics behind National's carefully bland façade damage their prospects for a third term? A lot depends on the other

conservative parties. Cameron Slater is explicitly quoted in the book as saying that, if MMP stays and the small parties of the Right fall out of Parliament, "National is f\*\*ked". Byron Clark looks at the centre-right as a whole and examines its prospects.

What is the alternative, though? As Ian Anderson ably explains in his article, Labour offers a kinder, gentler face to the same old management of neo-liberalism. While Labour no longer shuns the Green Party, this can only be because the Greens themselves have moved inside the "big tent" of accepting neoliberal corporate politics – the left wing of the establishment, the party of comfortable but socially conscious small business and successful professionals.

So under what circumstances can a socialist organisation like *Fightback* – pushing for a fundamental transformation of relations of work, production and power throughout society – support an alliance of the *tino rangatiratanga* / broad left MANA movement with the upstart Internet Party, founded by a German millionaire with an outlandish personality? *Fightback* works within MANA because of its commitment to represent te pani me te rawakore [the poor and the dispossessed]. We are able to keep working because it is a democratic party – when the leadership is wrong, it is willing to listen to activists; and because no real change in Aotearoa-New

cont. p4

## About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. *Fightback* stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

*Fightback* participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring "rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed." Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

*Fightback* stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

*Fightback* is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

*Fightback* also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

*Fightback* stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

**Fightback**  
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

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### Coordinating Editors

Daphne Lawless, Ian Anderson

### Proofing/Content

Bronwen Beechey

### Layout:

Joel Cosgrove

### Assisting Editors

Wei Sun, Kelly Pope,  
Grant Brookes, Byron Clark, Thomas Roud

# Editorial/National politics

*Editorial cont.*

Zealand is possible without the most intimate involvement of the tangata whenua.

But to some degree MANA represents “traditional” constituencies for the radical left. The Internet Party, in contrast, aims at the young and the wired. Although funded by Kim Dot-com, the party is led by activists of the traditional social-democratic Left such as leader Laila Harré, and kept moving by younger activists such as Miriam Pierard, who is interviewed extensively

in this issue. While not attracted to a “traditional” socialist programme, these young people – according to Pierard – have a strong belief in civil liberties, social equality, freedom of information and an antipathy to corporate power. Traditional politics has had nothing to say to them until now.

It is precisely the Internet Party and MANA Movement’s constituencies which the strategy of Whale Oil and his co-thinkers want to keep out of politics altogether. They want electoral choice restricted to, at the extreme, the now rather tame Green Party. The Internet-

MANA alliance aims at complementary audiences with the same vision seen from two perspectives. With current polls showing five MPs to be elected from this alliance, this is the best chance since the 1990s for those excluded from the “rock-star” neoliberal economy to vote for an alternative. *Fightback* encourages all readers to take that chance.



## National and its right wing friends

by Byron Clark, *Fightback*.

National today appears to be seeing a level of popularity unheard of in the MMP era. But behind the polls, the reality is much more mundane. Most political polls exclude undecided voters and those planning not to cast a ballot, yet these groups can occasionally make

up as many as 15% of respondents. At the last election, the number who didn’t vote was even higher. In 2011, just over a third of the population voted for National, a quarter didn’t vote at all.

The party has barely campaigned, beyond some tough-on-gangs murmuring, the meaningless #teamkey hashtag and the usual billboards featuring the faces

of its leader and candidates. National has very little to campaign on, as much of government policy is a holdover from the previous Labour government, which in turn did little to reverse the neoliberal economic reforms of the 80s and the 90s.

The changes National has made are hardly vote winners – further erosions



of work rights, including such basic rights as meal breaks, attacks on civil liberties though granting more powers to the GCSB, and opening up protected areas for mining and drilling. Added to that is the deeply unpopular asset sales program, which triggered a citizen initiated referendum. National has also made cuts in education, social welfare and ACC - the latter of which they reneged on somewhat after an effective campaign to restore funding for sexual abuse survivors.

National plans to win this election through inertia, hoping that enough people will be too disillusioned or disinterested to turn up at the polling booth. It's a reasonable strategy - when the past three decades have seen little difference between National-led and Labour-led governments, why bother when the outcome is going to be one of the two?

A change in government could be quite significant this year though. Labour has previously shunned the Green Party. Last time it was in government it aligned with parties to its right - NZ First and current National partner Peter Dunne - but the Greens have grown their support over the past decade and can't be ruled out. Of course, Labour has already stated it expects to rely on votes from National to pass legislation the Green Party would oppose on environmental grounds, so the presence of Green MP's at the cabinet table is unlikely to be a shock to the system.

The major challenge to the status quo comes from Internet-MANA. While Labour has ruled out having them in government, the electoral alliance between the MANA Movement and the Internet Party have been clear from the start that a vote for them is a vote to change the government. Last term Labour adopted MANA's "Feed the Kids" bill. Voting on the bill has been delayed until after the election, meaning a change in government will set it passed. MANA was the first party to call for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador

following Israel's latest bombing in Gaza, and within a fortnight the Green Party had echoed the call. The issue is now on the agenda. Small but significant victories like this make giving a tick to Internet-MANA on election day a worthwhile action.

National evidently recognises this threat, as Internet-MANA is engaging previous non-voters with social media, the 'party party' events, and packed-out meetings across the country. As a result John Key has been pouring scorn over Internet-MANA to a much greater degree than he has toward any other party. Recently Key made the sexist statement that Kim Dotcom was a "sugar daddy" to Laila Harre. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a sugar daddy as "a rich older man who lavishes gifts on a young woman in return for her company or sexual favours".

Among the 35% or so of the voting-age population that support National, some are no doubt better off under a National led government. Tax cuts for the rich are only a bad thing if you're not rich, and a few people are. That said, National could not survive if it didn't achieve a level of support from some of the working class. John Key's image plays to a type of identity politics. While he refuses to appear in front of the no-holds-barred interviewers of Radio New Zealand, he is a regular guest on sports radio and talkback stations. Key has created an affinity with a number of male voters, the sort of people who praised him for his "not all men" response to Labour leader David Cunliffe's speech on domestic violence at Women's Refuge. He's not losing any votes from that part of his base by standing by his "sugar daddy" comment either.

Identity politics is nothing new for National. Under the leadership of Don Brash, the party went from their worst election result in history to a near win in 2005 after a campaign full of rhetoric about Maori privilege, "one law for all" and the infamous Iwi/Kiwi advertising campaign - implying that Labour was

for Maori and National was for "everyone." Of course, the campaign was targeting just one ethnic group - Pakeha.

National would not go in for that rhetoric today, if for no other reason than the fact that it would seem hollow in light of its arrangement with the Maori Party, but the Maori Party is set to leave parliament (largely due to the stellar efforts of MANA's Annette Sykes who is challenging Te Ururoa Flavell in Waiariki.) National has indicated it would like voters in Epsom to elect ACT's David Seymour, and ACT has no qualms about playing the race card.

## ACT

With the election of philosopher Jamie Whyte as leader, and the merger-in-all-but-name with the Libertarianz (former leaders now hold high list positions in ACT) the party once known as the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers looks set to become a doctrinaire libertarian party - with poll results to match: in one poll they were equalled by the Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party, an organisation promoting the one libertarian policy the majority of the public actually agrees with.

Perhaps this is why Jamie Whyte's conference speech was light on ideology and instead focused on anti-Maori populism. According to former ACT on Campus vice president Guy McCullum, Whyte told a small gathering of ACT supporters in Dunedin on the morning of 20 July that he was in search of a "stunt ... because you know, the polls."

That stunt came in the form of the bizarre allegation that Maori occupy a similar social position to the aristocracy in pre-revolutionary France. "ACT's policies are about reminding you of scary burglars, zealous bureaucrats with a hidden green agenda, and resentful Maori... This is the imagery the vague words are designed to create. Liberals and libertarians are getting a rough deal from ACT" McCullum, who resigned from ACT following the speech, told

# National politics



Otago student magazine Critic.

ACT seems to be confused about what sort of party it is: libertarian, or conservative? Perhaps the next parliamentary term will be the last one ACT is relevant, and depending on the outcome in Epsom, they may become irrelevant even sooner. Unfortunately National has another right-appendage waiting in the wings.

## The Conservatives

Colin Craig may be unsure about the historical validity of the moon landing, but he's smart enough to see that ACT's disarray, combined with the retirement of NZ First firebrand Winston Peters (which really can't be that far away) opens up a space for his party. If not this year, then in 2017. As such, The Conservatives have joined in the attack on supposed Maori privilege, using the much more groan-inducing slogan "one law to rule them all" and borrowed a

number of NZ First policies.

Right now, the party is still a joke, but if given an Epsom-style deal in 2017 they may need to be taken seriously. For the mean time though, the best strategy is to keep laughing at them. If you need help, Colin Craig once did a glamour photo shoot which is easily found on Google Image Search.

## New Zealand First

While finding anti-immigrant rhetoric not the draw card it once was, NZ First has spoken against "separatism" and ruled out working with any "race based" parties, meaning there are now three parties flogging that dead horse (actually four, if we count the tiny 1Law4All party, which managed to register). NZ First has some progressive policies, but recent rhetoric has shown they are likely to support National. For example, one of their bottom lines is keeping the retirement age at 65, a policy where

National is actually more progressive than Labour.

In 2011 some commentators argued that returning NZ First to parliament would mean a change in government, and a vote for them would be 'strategic'. That was wrong then and it's wrong again now. At best it would mean a centre left bloc in opposition with less Labour MP's and more NZ First MPs (this is how Richard Prosser ended up getting a platform beyond conspiracy theory magazine *Investigate* to espouse his Islamophobia). At worst, it means keeping National in power with the help of a party elected in part by progressive voters.

The best outcome for anyone wanting a change in government would be for NZ First to drop below the 5% threshold, and the best option for bringing about a meaningful change is a party vote for Internet MANA.



## The politics, not the dirt is the problem.

by Ben Peterson, *Fightback*.

Nicky Hager's *Dirty Politics* just blew up the election. The material comes largely from Cameron Slater's leaked emails, but it covers much more than his personal activity. It outlines the activities of central National Party figures, up to and including Prime Minister John Key himself.

But the real importance of the book is not in revealing the dirty tactics that John Key and company will resort to. More importantly, it outlines the anti-democratic and big money interests that drive the National Party. It is not that just these are sleazy politicians. These people (John Key, Judith 'Crusher' Collins and more) use attack politics to hide their real agendas.

*Dirty Politics* is significant because it outlines the political project that the National Party believes in, but only talks about behind closed doors. John Key and the National Party have cultivated an image of themselves as the responsible moderates. The reality is that he leads a highly ideological government that is committed to furthering business interests. Part of this crusade is actively supporting the Whale Oil blog and its politics.

### The politics of Whale Oil

*Dirty Politics* shows that members of Key's staff have actively assisted Slater and Whale Oil. Key himself has admitted to being in regular personal contact with Slater. Key may claim a degree of separation from Whale Oil, but this is disingenuous. John Key is many things but he is not stupid. Key and his staff know full well what Whale Oil stands for, but have maintained links with the blog.

Hager's book outlines the political project of Whale Oil. The Whale Oilers actively and consciously seek to undermine democracy. Slater and his mates led the campaign against MMP (proportional representation) to try and limit space in electoral politics for progressive voices. The leaked emails show the group has actively sought to create an atmosphere that discourages people from voting. If candidates that aren't to their liking do win an election, the Whale Oil crew will attempt to blackmail or publicly shame them into resignation.

Slater and Whale Oil seek to undermine democracy so they can magnify the voices of the big businesses that bankroll their activities. Companies that pay for Slater to 'consult' for them get

the use of his blog and also his contacts in government. Not content with undermining the democratic process and giving voice to corporations, Whale Oil is also an enthusiastic participant in attempts to 'smash' unions. Unions are an important institution for working people to express their interests. Working people don't have thousands of dollars each month to sponsor their own attack blogger.

### The happy marriage of John and Cam

Whale Oil and John Key's office work together hand in glove. Whale Oil runs campaigns that National supports, but can't be seen to do for fear of a backlash. This degree of separation has meant that John Key has been able to viciously attack his enemies and facilitate corporate interests, while maintaining a cleaner image.

John Key presents himself as a reasonable moderate, who is popular with regular people and shares their interests. This is a deliberate untruth.

This National government wants to increase the power of corporate interests and undermine the position of everyone else. However, they recognise that the



# National politics

policies they want to implement (like further asset sales or cutbacks to health and education) are extremely unpopular. They are constrained by the potential democratic power of the public.

Thus, to implement their policies, this potential democratic power must be marginalised and silenced. Participation in elections must be undermined. MMP, which creates space for alternatives to be articulated, should be attacked where possible. Any political opponent, whether it be Len Brown, Kim Dotcom or the unions, must be destroyed. All real or potential alternatives to the neo-liberal agenda must be neutralised.

The reality of this agenda is important to recognise because it also shows us

how these politics can be beaten.

## How to beat them

These right-wing policies are deeply unpopular - John Key knows that. That's why he is desperate to be seen as a nice guy who likes the rugby and avoids debate. National fear a backlash if their true agenda is understood. *Dirty Politics* exposes that agenda.

Hager finishes the book by calling for more resources and greater ethics for journalism. This would be an important improvement for public debate, but journalism is not what scares John Key or the right-wing bloggers.

They're terrified of democracy.

*Dirty Politics* shows how National has actively tried to eliminate any potential alternatives to their political project. The election on September 20 will be an important opportunity to demonstrate how they have failed to do so. In particular, they are terrified of the MANA Movement and the Internet Party and the alternative they represent.

These attacks on democracy will not end with Key out of office. Democracy can only function for ordinary people when ordinary people are actively involved. New political movements, independent media and resurgent unions are necessary to provide a counter-voice to the corporate interests and their seat warmers, online and in government.

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## Whale Oil leaks: Anti-politics from above





by Daphne Lawless, *Fightback*

As we go to press, the election campaign has been turned upside down by a new book by investigative journalist Nicky Hager. *Dirty Politics* is based mainly on a leak of eight gigabytes of emails and Facebook messages from “Whale Oil”, the vicious right-wing scandal-mongering blog edited by Cameron Slater.

The book lays out convincing evidence that leading figures in the National Government – including Justice Minister Judith Collins and staff in the office of Prime Minister John Key – have actively worked with Whale Oil and other right-wing blogs to conduct personal smear campaigns on Labour and other opposition parties, including Internet Party founder Kim Dotcom. Nicky Hager is himself presented as one of the targets – another right-wing blogger, according to the book, tried to pass on Hager’s personal details to angry Chinese billionaires.

But it’s crucial to identify the real problem. Hager is not saying there is anything wrong about the National Party feeding information to friendly blogs. Certainly, this is something “they all do”. The “dirt” in *Dirty Politics* is the reliance on personal attack, vilification and smear. When Cameron Slater declares that he wants evidence of “[opposition MPs] Andrew Williams or Winston Peters drunk... [Auckland mayor] Len Brown rooting in brothels”, he is in fact practising a kind of “anti-politics from above”.

## “They’re all the same...” – really?

“Anti-politics” is a term which has been used for an attitude which has arisen in many protest movements. It’s summed up in the slogan from Argentina, *¡que se vayan todos!* (Get rid of them all!) It’s cynicism that electoral politics can do any good; it’s the idea that all politicians lie, that all movements are corrupt, that

the whole system of media and democracy is a fraud. Unfortunately, it often slides into “conspiracy theory” about aliens, Jews, or some other bogey being the “real enemy”.

But what we have in *Dirty Politics* is different from the justified disgust of a repeatedly disillusioned mass. Slater’s anti-politics is a *deliberate strategy* used by the Right to demobilise and demoralize opponents and potential opponents. Simon Lusk, a National Party strategist and a close collaborator of Slater, argues in a strategy document previously leaked but reprinted in the book that left-wing activists can be best “demoralised”, and their voters demotivated, by personal attacks on their leaders rather than dealing with their politics.

So the strategy is: get some mud to stick to an activist or politician in the news, get people believing “they’re all the same, politics is too dirty, best not to get involved”. And of course that’s what John Key is doing right now, repeating that Hager is a “screaming left-wing conspiracy theorist”, whether those words make any sense or not. And National have been doing this since before Whale Oil became a household name – for example, when cabinet minister Paula Bennett released personal information to try to discredit protesting welfare beneficiaries.

*Dirty Politics* recounts Slater’s role in whipping up manufactured political controversies – like how many times various politicians visited Kim Dotcom’s mansion – which effectively distracted attention from policy debate or scrutiny on the Government. More recently, Slater has smeared Dotcom as a “Nazi” who hates John Key for being Jewish and Hollywood corporates for being “run by Jews”. If the purpose of attack-blog anti-politics is to make people quit and disengage from activism, then it makes sense that the German millionaire, who is attempting to rally a new constituency to electoral politics via the Internet Party, should be a major target.

## Personal attack

Another target of attack blogging is to personally smear the leaders of opposition parties. *Dirty Politics* tells one farcical story of Slater desperately trying to get video footage of Winston Peters “drunk” in a Wellington bar. Meanwhile, Labour leader David Cunliffe has apparently been followed around by operatives who record his every word and action, and put anything vaguely embarrassing online for use against him. The book even describes associates of Whale Oil putting embarrassing information on Wikipedia about Labour MPs’ sex lives.

Slater’s buddies apparently gave him the admiring nickname of “The Rush Limbaugh of New Zealand politics”. But Limbaugh – an nasty right-wing radio host in the US – is perhaps a less appropriate parallel than Andrew Breitbart, the recently deceased founder of the *Big Government* blog and its associated websites.

Breitbart’s websites have become notorious for exactly the kind of personalised attacks based on misleading evidence which Slater is bringing into play in New Zealand. For example, in 2011 they forced the resignation of Shirley Sherrod, an African-American agriculture civil servant, after publishing a video of her deceptively edited to make it look like she was biased against whites. Sherrod is currently suing the Breitbart websites. But probably the people at fault in that case were the Obama administration themselves, who dumped Sherrod without a proper investigation for fear of this right-wing attack blogging.

The book also discusses how Slater turns his filth-cannon against enemies in the National Party – such as people who get in the way of Simon Lusk’s grand plan to get hard-right candidates selected for safe rural seats. Once this is done, Whale Oil publishes an “utu post” – more or less an explanation of how the victory was carried out, and advertising

# National politics

for political hopefuls to become “clients” of himself or Lusk.

## Smears for sale

But Slater isn't just a political activist – he makes his living by doing the same job for corporate PR merchants. Corporate lobbyists, including the son of a former National cabinet minister, have paid Slater thousands to publish, under his own name, personal attacks on their targets. So, activists for plain packaging tobacco are targeted by cigarette companies. An association of cleaning services who had signed a union contract were mercilessly attacked to break them up. Maritime Union leaders had their details leaked to Slater by Ports of Auckland; and anti-obesity campaigners are smeared and belittled by the Food and Grocery Council. By a staggering coincidence, the latter is also headed by a former National cabinet minister.

The process of public vilification of those targeted by paying customers is helped by Whale Oil's regular blog commentators. If Whale Oil is the National Party's attack dog, then the comments section is Whale Oil's private school of piranhas. Slater's personal attacks do not usually extend to death threats and stalking – these come out of the comments boxes instead. Some of the blog's regular denizens are revealed in the book to be corporate lobbyists under pseudonyms, commenting on the articles they themselves planted.

The last part of the formula is the aggressive and misogynist language used by Whale Oil and his fan club. This atmosphere of continuous rage has the effect of whipping up a lynch-mob atmosphere among readers and commentators, and repressing any tendencies towards reflection or nuance. Hateful language against health advocates as “troughers” sucking at the public teat, or environmentalists as “the green Taliban”, boils over into fanciful macho tough-talk about someone with “a big set... slapping Helen Kelly around the face

[with them]”, or – worse – “a bullet in the head” of an MFAT public servant who was (wrongly) identified by Judith Collins as the source of some embarrassing leak.

Thus, Hager's book lays out a well-thought-out scheme by Slater and other right-wing bloggers to actually *prevent* substantive political debate; to drive voters away from all politics and activists away from fighting corporate malfeasance. Personalised attacks demoralise their targets (especially when the commenters add death threats) and evoke uncertainty among their supporters. No-one wants to deal with the “mad dogs” who inhabit the comments of Whale Oil or Kiwiblog on a daily basis. Slater and his mates want you to think that all politics and activism is dirty and everyone trying to change things is a venal scumbag. Then you won't bother their mates and paymasters any more.

## Pollies, journos and bloggers – you scratch my back...

The mainstream media have taken diametrically opposing attitudes so far. Some, like John Armstrong or Fran O'Sullivan – usually reliable National supporters – have declared themselves shocked by the information and firmly stated that John Key has questions to answer. Others, like Sean Plunket or Mike Hosking, have sneeringly dismissed the idea that there's “anything in” Hager's book, and suggested that Hager himself is a “criminal” for using leaked information.

The latter attitude is very similar to the hypocrisy shown by Whale Oil itself. Cameron Slater is quoted in the book as making nastily sexualised comments about women to his National Party mates, but suddenly turns into a morals crusader when trying to force Len Brown out of office for adultery. The attitude, then, is: whatever crime it is, *it's okay when our side do it*. This is the politics of total warfare.

But there's also the problem of what Americans call “the Beltway”. Many of the commentators who are now saying “but we knew all this already” probably did know it already, although only now is the evidence in the public domain. *But the general public does not know this.* It has not been publicised or printed. It's only been swapped as gossip among “political insiders”, press, PR flacks and party hacks, who think it's normal because they make a good living from it. Cameron Slater is successful because he has realised a simple truth, which is quoted elsewhere in the book as coming from the US Young Republicans: “*Reporters are lazy and ill-informed.*” Or – to put it kindly – reporters are under-resourced and under intense pressure from their employers to provide copy quickly and cheaply.

It's much easier to chase up a “hint” from Whale Oil – or Kiwiblog – than it is to do investigative reporting. It's fair to suggest that those journos who are dismissing Hager's book enjoy having someone like Slater around to do the dirty work. They can then say they're “just asking questions” – those questions having been fed to them by political or corporate bigwigs, via the attack blogs – as they make a good living cosyng up to the powerful in the Beehive or in the boardrooms.

## The media runs on Whale Oil

So what makes Whale Oil tick? Slater is – as anyone who has paid him attention in the past knows – a deeply unpleasant fellow. He is sexist, racist and openly contemptuous to those less fortunate. He has been open in the past about his clinical depression, which often expresses itself in rage. And his rage is directed not just at the Left or at the less fortunate, but at other insufficiently right-wing Nats, or the people who cost his father his job as National Party president (or who failed to get him a knighthood!)

But perhaps most importantly, Cameron

Slater loves power. He describes himself in the third person as “the whale”, glories in his influence over MPs and journalists, and is never happier than when he “destroys someone”. When his campaigns succeed, he makes grandiose pronouncements like “I own the news!” or “I’m a one-man union wrecking machine!”

It’s not just about the personal issues of one man, though – David Farrar’s less abusive but cleverer Kiwiblog plays a similar role, as did the now defunct “Cactus Kate”. But it’s also about class. Cameron Slater is the son of a former National Party president, born into privilege, and his distinction is that he says openly what is usually muttered over a brandy in quiet rooms. The people he talks to in these communications – Simon Lusk, Jordan Williams, Aaron Bhatnagar, Judith Collins – never once challenge his assumptions about how the world works, or which human beings are of value.

Power without responsibility, said the British politician Stanley Baldwin, was a prerogative misused by the press. But that’s even more so in the age of blogging. One weakness in Nicky Hager’s excellent book is his argument that bloggers – who openly mix “opinion and fact” – are unaccountable for what they do in a way that the mainstream media are not. But it’s the mainstream media, as we’ve argued above, who have lifted Slater from being “a jerk with a laptop” to someone who is relied on by the powerful and feared by their enemies.

The mainstream media *do not* abide by traditional standards of fact-checking and objectivity, to the extent that they ever have in commercialised journalism. They are under intense pressure to deliver clicks and advertising revenue with stories that grab the attention and are easy to tell. Cameron Slater only has power to the extent that he is used as the middle-man between, on one hand, political and corporate bosses with a story to feed to the public and the ability to pay (in money or prestige); and

a news media who have gotten used to stories handed to them on a plate, who have found that telling the stories that the élite like to hear is the best way to make a living.

## Learn 2 Internet

Slater is a symptom, not a cause, of the sick culture of neoliberal ideology reproducing itself in the news media. But in the same way that Slater has run rings around the “old media” and old-fashioned ways of doing politics, so too has he been tripped up by even newer forces. When “Anonymous” Internet forces crashed his website in January this year in revenge for his mocking a young man’s death in a car crash, the hard evidence of who asks him or pays him to do what job fell into the hands of those forces and was passed on to Nicky Hager.

Radical forces desperately need our own citizen journalism, supported by institutions who don’t have a vested interest in keeping the public demoralised, apathetic and angry. But to an extent, we already have a surfeit of engaged writers. What we need now is to extend the population of engaged *readers*. The book reveals that Slater’s attacks often begin as “concern trolling” – posing as a supporter of something who is “concerned” about some manufactured problem, in order to put doubts in the minds of real supporters.

Attack blogging tactics require secrecy and surprise – as Hager says, the victim often doesn’t even know there’s an orchestrated campaign against him or her until it’s too late. One problem of contemporary internet use is the tendency to believe any information which comes down the pipeline – this author herself has fallen into the trap of passing on misinformation because it “sounded real”. The Left must support skeptical reading and thinking, even about stories which we would like to be true. The day when we allow ourselves to tell lies because it promotes our cause, we become

the equivalents of Whale Oil.

Slater’s supporters yell that “the Left does it too”. This is of course just anti-politics in itself. But if the Labour Party or any other party have also engaged in smears, personalized abuse and other “anti-politics” against their opponents as detailed in *Dirty Politics*, we should look forward to hearing all about it, as we should the dirt which Slater purportedly has on Dotcom. Progressive and radical forces have no interest in attack blogging, destroying activists or discouraging political participation. The systematic deceit practiced by Whale Oil, his clients and his pet journalists, benefits only the powerful and rich. Only a principled Left, standing with the majority and guided by a skeptical quest for truth, can undermine this strategy.

The Anonymous forces who gave Hager his material are owed our thanks – as is Nicky Hager himself, for putting it in a way that the mainstream media can dismiss, but cannot ignore. Hacktivists and left journalists, in exposing the abusive and deceitful way power maintains itself, are a necessary part of achieving true justice and democracy.



# National politics

## Rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic? The Labour Party and MANA

by Ian Anderson, *Fightback*.

Early in July this year, Labour Party leader David Cunliffe made headlines by apologising for being a man. Stoked by capitalist media sensation, Prime Minister John Key responded that “not all men” abuse women.

For abuse survivors and their supporters however, Cunliffe sentiments were not entirely off the mark. Cunliffe’s original comment occurred at a Women’s Refuge event, with a pledge to invest \$60 million more into family violence services. His apology reflected widespread normalisation and acceptance of male violence, the fact that men perpetrate most abuse, (even most violence against men is inflicted by other men) and the lack of support for survivors of all genders.

Fightback, as a socialist-feminist organisation, can unite with the demand for increased survivor support. However, there is a deeper problem associated with the call for social spending. At the end of April this year, the government allocated \$10 million more for sexual violence support services, after pressure from the women’s movement, represented in parliament by Green MP Jan Logie. Even in the wake of this allocation, Christchurch Rape Crisis recently closed down due to underfunding, in the context of a 40% rise in reported sexual assaults since 2010.

2014 is the 30th anniversary of the election of the Fourth Labour Government. The Fourth Labour Government introduced neoliberalism – the dominant form of transnational capitalism defined by privatisation and cutbacks – to Aotearoa/NZ. No government has restored the level of social spending prior to the Fourth Labour Government.

While Labour’s leadership may reallocate some spending if they are elected, they show no interest in healing the deep cuts of the last 30 years. This is a grim historical irony for women’s organisations like Refuge and Rape Crisis, which achieved state recognition over a period of retreating social spending.

Labour’s leadership have pledged to raise the retirement age, a policy not even National supports. While they pledge to raise the minimum wage to a mere \$15, they also indicate that they will maintain National’s welfare attacks. This is a zero-sum game. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

Labour’s limitations are not solely a matter of uninspiring local policy or leaders, but of a transnational political-economic paradigm. The world’s richest man, Carlos Slim, recently called for a three-day working week to improve quality of life. Undercutting the apparently progressive headlines though, Slim asserted that retirement ages are too low and should be raised to 70 or 75. Slim’s reasoning, that a shorter working week could be necessary for a longer working life, seems slim comfort for those facing the prospect of menial labour into their 70s.

Generally, the already grim promised trade-offs; a nickel for your weekend, a dollar for your soul; are unreliable. Despite right-wing claims to grow the pie instead of sharing it equally, the pie seems to be getting smaller. Despite Slim’s recommendation, capitalist governments are overwhelmingly more likely to raise the retirement age than decrease the working week.

As superstar philosopher Slavoj Žižek recently observed, secretly negotiated trade agreements, such as the Trade in Services Agreement (TISA) and Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA),

set the economic agenda more than elections:

“The key decisions concerning our economy are negotiated and enforced in secret, and set the coordinates for the unencumbered rule of capital. In this way, the space for decision-making by the democratically elected politicians is severely limited, and the political process deals predominantly with issues towards which capital is indifferent.”

Labour’s leadership initiated the TPPA negotiations, and show no interest in reversing them, despite the wishes of their membership.

Ultimately, Labour’s leadership is firmly committed to managing neoliberalism. Labour’s base is in the public and community sector; civil servants, union bureaucrats, teachers. In fact, because they know the public sector better, Labour are in some ways better equipped to manage an austerity-lite program. While National’s policies are often driven by cronyism, (SkyCity) or seem ideological and arbitrary, (charter schools, asset sales) Labour seek to manage the public sector professionally and, where, possible, equitably.

Public debt has increased under National, due to both international borrowing and tax cuts for the rich. If Labour were to increase taxation and attempt to slash pensions, (currently the biggest slice of social spending) this may balance the books more smartly than National, but it would also undermine what support Labour has.

To give another example, the Labour Party knows the tertiary education sector well, and have been instrumental in restructuring it along market lines. The



Fourth Labour government got rid of the universal allowance and introduced student loans, the Fifth Labour government introduced the Performance-Based Research Fund (which treats universities not as places of learning, but producers of marketable research). Even Labour's apparently pro-student policies, like interest-free student loans, maintain a market model. By contrast, National appears to have no plan, making cuts such as getting rid of the student allowance for post-grad students – apparently undermining the continued emphasis on research, and without any significant government saving.

Ultimately, both major parties are rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Everybody knows the boat is leaking, everybody knows the captain lied. It's no wonder that the 2011 General Election saw the lowest turnout since women won the right to vote.

Socialists argue for the socialisation of property, the unlocking of wealth which could allow for a more fulfilling social existence, for self-determination and *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship) over resources. Right now, as the zero-sum game rages globally, the possibility of liberation seems remote. It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

While social transformation seems unlikely, it's the only realistic possibility if humans are to survive and flourish. This poses the question of where to start, how to organise, how to build from what we have. *Fightback* argues that in the long term, progressives must chart a course independent of the Labour Party. There are areas where we can unite with Labour Party members on campaigns, but ultimately we're heading in a different direction from the leadership.

After successive betrayals by both Labour and National governments, the MANA Movement formed around Hone Harawira, and other leaders with a proven radical history. Iwi networks, such as Ngāpuhi, provide the organised backbone of the MANA Movement –

for example, mobilising the nationwide *hikoi* against asset sales.

The difference between Labour and MANA is not simply a spectrum from 'far left' to 'centre left.' It's not even a matter of MANA's leadership being consistently progressive – the MANA Movement held Harawira to account on same-sex marriage rights. In fact where Labour MPs treated marriage rights as a conscience issue, MANA owned the issue as a movement.

Labour's leadership seeks to manage neoliberalism equitably, MANA seeks *rangatiratanga* (leadership) for *te pani me te rawakore* (the poor and dispossessed), what Harawira calls "the largest tribe." This means building a democratic mass movement for justice and self-determination. MANA supports building 10,000 state houses, taking back assets, free education. To support this policy program, MANA calls for taxes on the rich (alongside scrapping GST).

For MANA's Māori leadership this means building alliances, where possible, with sympathetic Pākehā and tau iwi – on the basis that "what's good for Māori is good for everyone." In 2011, MANA stood leftist Pākehā candidates including John Minto and Sue Bradford in General Electorate seats, to campaign for the party vote. This didn't significantly expand MANA's base beyond its stronghold in Harawira's Te Tai Tokerau.

In the lead-up to the 2014 General Election, MANA has formed a tactical alliance with the Internet Party, founded by German millionaire Kim Dotcom. MANA was widely criticised for cutting a deal with Dotcom, even by parties which habitually take donations from big business. *Fightback* also raised initial concerns about Dotcom's trustworthiness, although we have reaffirmed our support for the MANA Movement.

Traditionally no friend of the working class, Dotcom was forced into a corner by his experience of state repression. At the 2014 MANA AGM, Waiariki candidate Annette Sykes stated that

policies and principles must be a bottom line in any deal. At a recent speech on the Internet MANA road trip, Sykes observed how Dotcom's encounter with state repression resonated, in terms recalling the Urewera raids under the last Labour government:

"Families are destroyed when the cops come into your house with their guns. That's what happened to Kim Dotcom. I must say that was the only thing about him, I don't care about his money, that was the only thing that I really admired him for. Because when it happened he stood up for him and his kids and his family."

In contrast to Labour and National's imperialist consensus, Dotcom opposes the TPPA, the Five Eyes, and the GCSB. Dotcom's opposition to surveillance and secret trade agreements, key parts of the transnational imperialist apparatus, formed the initial basis of his tactical alliance with the left.

The Internet Party itself, still in formation, is shaping out to be a progressive organisation. MANA underlined changing the government as a further bottom line for the alliance. With veteran unionist Laila Harre stepping in as Internet Party leader, and crucially MANA retaining independence to pursue its own policy program, the deal at this stage appears to be shaping out well for MANA. Internet Mana aims to mobilise non-voters; overwhelmingly young people, Māori, the marginalised and dispossessed; and is currently polling at 2.3%, enough to get Harawira, Harre, and Sykes in on a progressive policy platform. Reportedly at the 2014 National Party conference, Attorney General Chris Finlayson stated his concern about the Internet MANA alliance:

"The fragmentation on the left hasn't made the hydra weaker, only more unstable if it can force its way into power again."

# National politics

Finlayson pays Internet Mana a disarming compliment here. Internet Mana is strong, but unstable. Hone Harawira is an unstable partner, because he was unwilling to sacrifice the foreshore and seabed for crumbs from the table. Contrary to portrayals of Laila Harre as a pawn, Harre also has an unstable record, having walked from the Fifth Labour government over the occupation of Afghanistan. Instability may seem self-defeating in the short term, but it's necessary in the long term.

For transformative politics, parliamentary representation is one tool in a wider strategy, not the main goal. Transformation is not just a matter of changing the government. It's not even a matter of electing proven movement leaders to opposition. Transformation requires sustained independent struggle in every

sector, an inclusive movement for economic and political sovereignty.

Under the Fifth Labour government, victories such as the \$12 minimum wage and the abolition of youth rates were won through struggle by independent community groups and fighting unions. Democratic organisations of the people are necessary both for survival, and for the possibility of greater victories.

By entering a capitalist government, MANA would risk sacrificing this fighting independence for a seat at the table. Labour continues to rule out working with MANA, undermining their own limited shot at forming a government, because they recognise the threat Harawira and MANA represent to business as usual. In keeping with

his democratic approach, Harawira has stated that any post-election deal would have to be approved by the membership.

As phrased by socialist commentator Giovanni Tiso, "wanting to kick the Tories out of government is one of the noblest of human feelings, and saying that it isn't nearly enough, the most banal of statements. In the end we're still left to face those different evils."

For those who accept that a Labour-led government isn't nearly enough, it's a question of building people's organisations and movements for the long haul. *Fightback* seeks to play a part in weaving the people into a new radical democratic body, which can chart a course beyond the two-party cycle that keeps us locked into capitalism.



## Hone Harawira: Burning the flag or accepting the evil

Burning the Israeli flag in Auckland in protest over the murder of innocent civilians in Gaza is nothing to be ashamed of" said MANA Leader and Tai Tokerau MP, Hone Harawira. "Calling for both sides to stand down when one side is annihilating the other though, IS something to be ashamed of." "On one side you have a state with nuclear weapons, tanks, artillery, fighter planes, helicopter gunships, warships, a fully operational army, and the best missile defence system in the world

that has killed hundreds of innocent civilians, displaced more than 100,000 people, and destroyed the infrastructure of the people in Gaza, in the last couple of weeks."

"On the other side you have kids with rocks, and irregulars with rockets who have killed 2 civilians."

"Martin Luther King once said, He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it. He who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperat-

ing with it."

"Israel has committed a monstrous evil by its massacre of innocent civilians. MANA refuses to passively accept that evil and chooses to protest against it, and if that protest involves burning a mere flag, then so be it."

"Those condemning the burning of the flag might want to take a look in the mirror and ask themselves what it is that they are doing to protest against the massacre in Gaza."



## Regional Joint Statement

In the past week, Israeli military forces have escalated their offensive on the Gaza Strip. Israeli warplanes have increasingly targeted houses, civilian-populated areas and civilian facilities in the Gaza strip. Israeli warplanes have destroyed a number of houses while their residents were inside, without any prior warnings, killing and wounding many Palestinian civilians.

The Israeli government has cynically exploited the killing of three Israeli youth and used this to whip up a racist hysteria against Palestinians and the Hamas government in Gaza. It has done this without producing any evidence about who was responsible for those killings. A campaign of indiscriminate violence against Palestinians has been incited and one Palestinian boy has been tortured and burnt to death. Now even more indiscriminate retribution has been inflicted on the civilian residents of Gaza. Collective punishment is a violation of international humanitarian law.

The ruthless military offensive conducted by Israeli forces has nothing to do with “self-defence”, but a genocidal aggression on Gaza and intensification of bloody repression against Palestinians who had been constantly denied their right to self-determination by the Zionist regime.

### **The undersigned organisations:**

Strongly condemn Israel's latest attack on Gaza, Palestine and demand that it stop its attacks on Gaza and respect international law including the UN resolution 242 which demands Israel withdraw from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, territories which Israel has illegally occupied since 1967.

Call upon all governments to immediately withdraw their ambassadors from Israel, cut diplomatic ties and end all military and defence ties with Israel.

Call for the intensification of the economic boycott, disinvestment and sanctions campaign against Israel.

### **Initiating signatories**

**Socialist Alliance**, Australia

**Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM)**, Malaysia

**Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM)**, Philippines

**Socialist Aotearoa**, New Zealand

**Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation**

**Partai Rakyat Pekerja (Working People Party)**, Indonesia

**Socialist Alternative**, Australia

**Partai Rakyat Demokratik (PRD)**, Indonesia

**Solidarity**, Australia

**Awami Workers Party**, Pakistan

**Fightback**, Aotearoa/New Zealand

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## New Zealand state's quandary in the Asia-Pacific

*by Jared Phillips, Reprinted from socialistvoice.org.nz*

In May the US government brought criminal charges against five Chinese military officials for hacking into the systems of US energy and steel companies. They stole trade secrets and conducted economic espionage.

The Chinese government retaliated by

urging domestic banks to remove high-end servers made by IBM and replace them with locally-made servers. Technology companies operating in China are now being vetted and state-owned companies have been instructed to cut ties with US consulting firms. These developments are examples of increased tensions between the US and China.

### **US-China tensions dominate region**

The Asia-Pacific region is one of the main arenas where US-China tensions play out. A new order is developing in East Asia after 40 years of relative stability. In many ways the world is moving from being ‘unipolar’ to ‘bipolar’ for the first time since the fall of the USSR in 1991.



# International

China has seen huge economic growth over the past 30 years. It experienced 10% annual growth rates from 1985 to 2011. While China's per capita GDP is far behind the US, its overall GDP is gaining ground. This gives China a significant amount of strategic and political weight on the world stage.

At the same time the position of the US in East Asia is in decline. Between 2000 and 2012 on the US's share of trade to East Asia fell from 19.5% to 9.5%. China's share rose from 10% to 20% in the same period. In 2009 Obama announced the US's 'Pivot to Asia' foreign policy, an attempt to check China's emergence as a challenger to US dominance in the region.

Increased US-New Zealand military cooperation

In mid-2012 the NZ and US governments signed the Washington Declaration which set out to achieve regular high-level dialogue and enhanced cooperation between the two nations. In 2013 there was a meeting of Pacific Army Chiefs which was co-chaired by New Zealand and the US. Following this meeting the NZ Defence Minister Jonathan Coleman and US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel made a joint-press release announcing further military cooperation.

Coleman said "Our defence relationship with the US is in great shape, and provides a strong platform for working closely together in the future". In many ways US-NZ military relations are the strongest since the ANZUS relationship ended in 1984.

The closer cooperation is not merely a result of a set of National Party policies. The cooperation stems from the needs of New Zealand business interests. New Zealand plays the role of a mini-imperialist force in the region attached to the US.

The New Zealand government began patching up relations with the US in the early 2000s. The Labour Party sought to straddle the US-Franco ten-

sions but ultimately sided with US imperialism by making commitments to the so-called 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq. Labour's election adverts in 2002 sought to promote this relationship with images imagery of then US Secretary of State Colin Powell with a voice over message saying that we are "very, very good friends".

Up until this year National has civilianised military roles and cut military spending. However for 2014 National has allocated an increase of \$100 million to military spending. This is part of an additional \$535 million being allocated over the next four years. This has essentially been a restructure based on the needs of the US in the Asia-Pacific region.

## NZ and China's strong economic links

The world economic crisis has not had such a dramatic effect on New Zealand as it has on other regions. This is because New Zealand's economic integration is strongest with Australia and China whose economies remained relatively stable for the first years of the crisis.

There are more New Zealand companies with overseas production engagements in China than any other country. In 2013 China became New Zealand's biggest export destination. This was the first time in decades that the biggest destination was not Australia. New Zealand's next strongest links are with Australia, and the Australian economy is also intimately linked with China.

The Chinese economy has grown by around 7.5% over the last year. This is a slowdown on the 10% growth China had experienced for decades before the crisis began to take effect. With the slowdown Chinese corporate debt has increased by up to 260% in the period between 2008 and 2013. Local government debt has also increased.

China is facing a crisis of over capac-

ity and its main export markets are struggling with low growth. This further drives China's need to conquer new markets and exploit cheap resources in the region.

## TPPA an attempt to strengthen US influence

The Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) did not initially include the US but the US joined it and has sought to dominate the negotiations. From the US government's perspective the agreement is an attempt to counter China's emergence as a power in the region.

The agreement would serve the interests of big corporations and empower them against states. It would establish trade tribunals to regulate disputes between companies and states. This would equate to bringing neo-liberal economic policies into law. A corporation could sue a state for introducing laws that undermine profits and violate the TPPA. Such measures would hamper the ability of working people to fight for reforms.

In the negotiations the US have often used heavy handed tactics and this has caused other countries to hesitate to sign. The National government is currently trying to turn its own stalling to an advantage by saying it will not sign without the support of the population. However National has engaged undemocratically in the negotiations and the Labour Party have not opposed them. The truth is that National is currently recoiling because aspects of the US's corporate agenda are at odds with aspects of New Zealand's corporate agenda. This is just one of the dilemmas NZ big business faces.

## Pacific Islands

While the capitalist class is collaborating in order to advance its interests the left and workers movement must also



seek to build links between working people and the poor in the region. The Pacific Islands will be of particular importance.

The fight against climate change in New Zealand and other advanced economies must be intensified to help prevent further climate change displacement of the people on these islands. For those who have already been forced to flee we must fight for their rights as refugees.

In some Pacific nations up to half the population rely on money sent from family members in New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere. It is imperative that socialists and the workers movement play a leading role supporting full equal rights for Pacific workers.

## Future struggle

The situation in the Asia Pacific region is becoming more fraught. While the New Zealand ruling class has hedged its bets with US imperialism, the economy is also highly dependent the US's main imperialist rival, China. On the face of it New Zealand's domestic situation appears relatively stable. However, an analysis of the regional situation reveals that there is much scope for destabilisation in the years ahead.

It is clear that economic and political rivalries will continue to sharpen in this part of the world. The only way this can be resolved in a positive way is if working people throughout the region unite their struggles and fight for an alternative to the system that pits nations and people against each other.

While democracy struggles in places like Fiji and Tonga must be supported we should argue that only by transforming society along socialist lines will we really be able to address the issues ordinary people face. A socialist federation of the region would promote cooperation and the democratic sharing of resources. This is the alternative to oppression and imperialist aggression.

# Why you should get involved in Fightback

## We oppose imperialism

The fight against imperialism is a vital part of the fight against capitalism. Imperialism is the system whereby rich countries dominate poor ones. New Zealand is a junior partner in the world imperialist system. The Workers Party opposes any involvement in imperialist wars such as those being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, even

if the involvement is under the banner of so-called "peace-keeping". We demand an immediate end to the interference in the affairs of Pacific Island nations by New Zealand and its ally Australia. We want an end to all involvement in imperialist military alliances and the dismantling of their spy bases.

## We fight oppression

We are serious about actively fighting oppression based on nation, race, gender or sexuality – here and now, not just "after the revolution". But we believe class is central to all such oppression, and therefore those struggles are linked to the broader class

struggle. We support militant direct action by Maori for real equality; conversely, we see the Treaty process as a bureaucratic means to undercut such resistance and nurture a Maori middle class which will benefit very few.

## Contact

### Auckland

Daphne  
027 220-9552  
daphne@randomstatic.net

### Christchurch

Thomas  
021 155-3896  
thomas.roud@gmail.com

### Wellington

Joel  
022 384-1917  
joel.cosgrove@gmail.com



## Unite against poverty wages and zero-hour contracts: An interview with Heleyni Pratley

Heleyni Pratley is an organiser for Unite Union and a member of *Fightback* (Aotearoa/NZ).

*In May, Heleyni attended the first global conference on fast food organising. Fightback writer Ian Anderson interviewed her.*

**FB:** Can you tell us about Unite Union and how you first got involved?

**HP:** Sure, so I got involved with Unite Union because I was in the Workers Party [a predecessor of Fightback], a socialist group active on campus.

At the time I was active in the Students Association, and was also working many casualised jobs. So Unite was interesting, they'd just gotten rid of youth rates and had contracts with all the major fast food companies.

Unite focuses on organising young casualised workers. The traditional union movement saw these workers, especially in fast food, as being un-organisable. But Unite proved everybody wrong... It does involve constant recruitment because the turnover's so high.

The workers that Unite organises are mainly in fast food and cinemas. Cinema workers and fast food workers are

completely casualised, the only people who technically have full-time hours are the restaurant managers. They'll often have large workforces; McDonald's recommends that any store should have 70 employees at any one time. The model is Taylorism, basically keep everyone on their toes, worried that they could lose their job or hours at any time; hours are used as punishment.

So Unite has unionised workers in those sectors and won collective agreements through struggle.

**FB:** Can you tell me about the recent fast food workers' conference in New York?

**HP:** Sure, so the conference that I attended involved delegations of fast food workers and unionists from 26 countries all over the world.

We heard about struggles happening for example in Thailand, where workers are actually offered large sums of money to not join the union. For some of the workers it was actually very risky to attend the conference.

It was organised by the International Labour Organisation. It was the first ever global conference on fast food organising.

**FB:** Why was it important for Unite to

send a delegation?

**HP:** Unite has been at the global forefront of this organising.

The way that McDonalds operates, (and other fast food chains like KFC) is the same globally. While that's a strength in terms of their business model and global exploitation, it's a weakness in terms of us relaying what we've learnt, so other workers and other unions can draw from those lessons in fighting these companies.

**FB:** What was your main takeaway from the conference discussion?

**HP:** What I learnt was, we're in New York – it's the heart of the beast, the heart of the empire – and the problems are the same.

The workers are paying workers in the US, like everywhere else, the minimum they can get away with. Workers at McDonald's in the US are actually on food stamps, even though they're employed, so similar to New Zealand where we have employed people on Accommodation Supplements.

So the similarities were more than what I thought they would be initially, and I think that now more than ever, global workers' solidarity is important.

**FB:** What was your understanding of the fast food workers' campaign in the US?

**HP:** The Fast Food Forward campaign in the US seems to have come out of the Occupy movement, which is a really positive aspect.

A lot of people have said that Occupy failed, but I disagree with that because Occupy was successful at raising consciousness, and it's been heartening to see that's fed into more concrete, long-term ways of engaging in struggle. That *Fightback* is really needed in the US. McDonald's workers are on \$7.25, and that's the non-tipped minimum wage, so if you're on a tipped minimum wage it's actually from \$2.15 upwards.

So my understanding of the fast food campaign in the US is that it's come out of Occupy, it's community-led, and unions are also playing a role. I think that community involvement is where the campaign's success lies. That's what we've seen in Unite as well, that you have to have the wider community involved.

**FB:** What actions were you involved with?

**HP:** I participated in the delivery of a letter to McDonald's, to explain that there would be global actions, on the 15th of May, including workers' going on strike. There was a press conference in New York where workers from all over the world spoke, and then we delivered the letter.

Of course we weren't allowed into the restaurant, you know there was a little

bit of pushing and shoving. In the end the letter was pinned to the wall.

I also went to Boston and helped a community group, who were getting workers at a restaurant prepared to take a strike action on the 15th, and what I saw from these workers was a real desperation. In a lot of worksites there's fear around taking strike action, and we see that definitely in New Zealand too.

But in the US, as soon as we said that in New Zealand the minimum wage is \$14.25, you could see how people were hopeful – and pissed off!

**FB:** What are some of the differences and similarities internationally?

**HP:** In fast food, there are more similarities than differences. So workers are treated exactly the same way. Hours are used as punishment. Hours aren't guaranteed. Everyone at McDonald's is on minimum wage, everyone is completely casualised.

Which means things that have worked for Unite in NZ, will work at other restaurants around the world, and I'm sure that we can learn a lot from what they're doing.

The left has clearly been smashed in the US, just as it has been in NZ. The left is weak, and this is reflected in the trade union movement. So we need to be thinking seriously about rebuilding, and how we rebuild.

But similarly there is strength in a conviction, and a desire, to change our situation, to make sure McJobs are not our future. There seems to be an understanding that if we don't stand up,

things will get worse.

So I think complacency is changing. In the '90s and early 2000s there was a certain sense that there's nothing we can do about neoliberalism, but things like Occupy show a global shift.

We see Russell Brand talking about revolution, and whatever you think of Russell Brand, these things are now in the popular discourse.

**FB:** Now that the struggle against casualization is getting globally organised, what do you think the next steps are?

**HP:** We established links, which is fantastic, we need to build on those and maintain those.

For example, I met people who are organising the factories where McDonald's burgers are made. That is just awesome. I think any Marxist is like, that is the point of production! I don't want to fetishise that too much, but I think these global networks need to increase. It's inspirational because it's another way for us to realise our power as workers.

And our power is by coming together and taking action, so coming together globally is something workers can feed off, I don't think that can be underestimated.

**FB:** What are the next steps locally, for Unite?

**HP:** Unite is committed currently to changing the government, so we're running the Get Out The Vote Campaign. After that we're looking into launching a campaign against Zero Hour contracts.

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## Elections and migrant-bashing: Full rights for migrant workers

by Joe McClure, *Fightback*.

Labour and National both have unpromising records when it comes to im-

migration policy. National, represented by Minister of Immigration Michael Woodhouse, has suffered a series of embarrassments this year. Groups of Filipino workers employed in Christch-

urch were found to be victims of exploitative company Tech5, which was keeping them in cramped conditions, taking \$125 per person per week to "pay for the cost of their tools", and coer-



# International

ing them into working for the company without complaint, or risk losing their visa and being returned to the Philippines. A recent raid on fruit picking operations in the Bay of Plenty found eight people working without visas, and more than 18 companies operating in breach of immigration requirements. In May, Woodhouse was found to have met with overseas investors and significant National party donors, including prominent Chinese businessman Donghua Liu, before deciding on their visa applications.

Labour has also been dogged by the case of Liu, when it was found that Labour leader David Cunliffe had intervened in his application, after Liu allegedly paid \$100,000 for a bottle of wine at a Labour party fundraiser. Despite Cunliffe's adamant claim that he never got involved with Liu's visa application in 2014, it has been revealed that in 2003 he wrote a letter asking for Liu's immigration application to be fast-tracked. Liu donated an undisclosed amount to Labour after the application was approved.

Labour's hostility to immigrants (other than wealthy businessmen) was made clear in their election policy, where they announced they wanted to reduce immigration to avoid raising housing prices. Despite the party's frequent attacks on National's immigration stance, Deputy Labour Leader David Parker made it clear that the Labour party intend to control the number of immigrants arriving in New Zealand, reducing the number arriving without qualifications or skills of value to the New Zealand economy, and fast-tracking those instances where applicants can demonstrate that they can contribute to growing New Zealand's GDP.

Labour party policy involves a points-based system, which ensures that immigrants are spread throughout the country rather than being concentrated in just one or two regions. In a concession to potential coalition partners such as the Green Party, Labour promised to

ensure immigrants are paid no less than the minimum wage, provide training opportunities for upskilling immigrants, and increase the refugee quota from 750 per year to 1000. In contrast, the National party claims that the risk of refugees targeting New Zealand is growing, a claim echoed by NZ First leader Winston Peters.

Peters has announced his party's position on immigration, involving increased security and a reduction in the number of student visas granted, in line with the party's conservative ideology; however, the lack of detail in Peters' statements prevent a clearer appraisal of his position.

In contrast, the Green Party, in their policy framework, include promises to increase the refugee quota to 1,000, with a focus on uniting families, ensuring that migrant workers are paid no less than local workers and employed in the same conditions, and will create opportunities for people on temporary visas to upskill so that they can apply for permanent residency.

Finally, MANA-Internet policy reflects a more open-borders position, in which skilled visitors from overseas can come and go from New Zealand as necessary. Internet Party founder Kim Dotcom has been a very prominent figure in immigration discussions, as his residency was granted under dubious conditions by Immigration NZ, and subsequent to this, an illegal search of his home was carried out, including the seizure of various items belonging to him.

Dotcom claims that former Immigration Minister Jonathan Coleman pressured Immigration NZ to accept his residency application, as part of a deal with the US government, and to ensure he invested in the NZ economy. He further suggests that this was to make it easier for the US government to extradite him out of New Zealand, as he was accused of copyright fraud by various American media companies. According to reports released under the Official Information Act, Immigration NZ were

aware of these accusations made against Dotcom, but felt that his economic contribution was more important than his legal situation.

As a result of these obfuscations and denials, Dotcom has demanded transparency in government processes, and a full review of the relevant diplomatic and intelligence agreements. MANA leader Hone Harawira has also taken up this view, as have his fellow candidates; John Minto demanded that Woodhouse explain why the NZ government was discriminating against Pacific people from Tonga and Samoa while putting out the welcome mat for anyone from Australia, irrespective of skills and criteria.

New Zealand employs numerous workers from around the Pacific each year to take part in fruit picking and other seasonal employment, and this creates a valuable opportunity for these people to work in the NZ environment, improving their English language fluency, as well as picking up skills that they can use both in New Zealand and in their home countries. However, these workers are often discriminated against, as in the example of the construction workers in Christchurch, and the MANA Movement is one of only a few parties that have promised to prevent this happening.

MANA has offered to migrant workers the same pay and conditions as local workers, without the risk of having their visas revoked, and enabling them to receive the same support as a New Zealander working in that job could expect. This is just one of the areas where *Fightback* stands alongside MANA, in affirming the rights of dispossessed workers, and demanding fair and reasonable treatment without discrimination, whether for migrant workers employed in New Zealand, or New Zealand-born workers.



## Miriam Pierard of the Internet Party: “Speaking the language of youth”

by Daphne Lawless, *Fightback* (Auckland)

Miriam Pierard, the 28-year-old Internet Party candidate for Auckland Central, is no stranger to *Fightback* – “a very good magazine”. She compliments us in particular on our “really amazing article” explaining our decision to support the Internet Party-MANA Movement alliance, and she attended our “Capitalism: Not Our Future” conference last Queen’s Birthday in Wellington.

After qualifying as a teacher, Miriam backpacked around the world in 2013. “Thinking that I might want to get into politics, I wanted to see how the rest of the world worked.” In the process, she experienced places like Iceland and Bolivia where local popular movements have rejected business-as-usual neoliberal politics and created space for alternatives.

In Iceland she met with Jón Gnarr, comedian and former mayor of the capital Reykjavik, who led a populist electoral challenge which unseated the conservative local council. “He stood up and said, our political system doesn’t work, let’s bring something new in.... they got overwhelming support because they brought humour into politics, made it fun again – and they gave people hope, because they were normal people who Icelanders knew.”

After spending time in Colombia learning Spanish, she went to Bolivia, occupying herself with “looking after pumas”. “I was interested in the indigenous movement, how they had expelled McDonalds from their country and tried to do the same with Coca-Cola.

“I spoke to miners in Potosí, drinking hideous alcohol and chewing coca leaves. That was a horrific place – I felt really strange afterwards. In some ways,

conditions haven’t changed in 300 years. All the mines are worker co-operatives. Even in these dark dangerous places there is still hope, and it’s about personal relationships.

“Experiencing all this across the world, especially in places like that, made me realise just how special New Zealand is and how important it is to take back our proud history of leading the world in progressive change. Looking at the current situation, I’m so ashamed.”

### Dawn of the Internet Party

Returning to New Zealand, says Miriam, she was particularly “angry at our country’s involvement with the

United States and the NSA”. She was sympathetic to both the Greens and the MANA movement, but “I stayed away from political parties because of that tribal, territorial culture – fighting over votes without seeing the bigger picture.”

When German internet millionaire Kim Dotcom founded the Internet Party, she was originally ‘more skeptical



# MANA Movement



than I should have been... I had only been reading the mainstream media! But I was excited that there was something new coming to shake up the election."

Miriam was impressed that the Internet Party managed to reach the requisite 500 members "virtually overnight" and understood that "there was something serious about this party". However, like *Fightback* at the time, and like veteran left activist Sue Bradford, Miriam was initially sceptical about the alliance with MANA.

"The mainstream media was trying to paint it as Kim Dotcom buying the Left. I still support Sue in that she made her decision based on her values. But on the day of the rally against the TPPA (Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement) in early April, I discussed this with [left blogger] Martyn Bradbury, who explained the strategy... I sat on the floor astounded by the genius of this."

Not being totally convinced, she decided to attend the MANA AGM which would discuss the alliance. "I was really impressed by the level of debate. I was a little bit wary of what Kim had said, but proud of the MANA leadership and the Internet Party for having the guts to have the conversation."

Miriam feels that Hone Harawira showed leadership in presenting the debate, and that Kim Dotcom dealt well with questions from the various rohe. "I remember that the *Fightback* people were nervous about the proposal – but every single person in that room was heard. And now I see that same thing is happening in the Internet Party, except that we do it online."

"By the end of the night I came away feeling really emotional. I ran into Annette Sykes, and I said 'Thank you so much for this day, the democratic process and debate was so impressive and overwhelming.' I started crying ... I

really felt empowered by that debate."

Sue Bradford has said that the debate was conducted in an "authoritarian and patriarchal" way, but Miriam doesn't agree. "Perhaps because I wasn't so involved with the politics of MANA, I didn't pick up on that. Sue was vocal and public about her stance, and perhaps people were responding to that." However, Miriam stresses "the Left in New Zealand is much better for having Sue", and more recently talked to her about how to "stay true to yourself" as an activist in Parliament. "I'm so glad we were able to have that conversation of solidarity."

## Two parties, one vision

On the other side of the debate, Miriam thinks that some Internet Party supporters "see MANA as a hardcore socialist organization which wants to burn down the houses of rich people."



Of course MANA has a strong socialist element, but some people are stuck in a kind of 1950s Red Scare mentality about what socialism means.

“The people in MANA with socialist leanings don’t necessarily think that a Stalinist state is a good idea. They don’t want top-down totalitarian control. Both Internet and MANA are interested in using the Internet, this incredible tool, to harness the incredible wealth of knowledge to enable democratic participation.

“Real democratic participation, that is, not just limited to ticking a box every three years.”

Miriam mentions her great respect for the MANA movement, and its leaders such as Hone Harawira, Annette Sykes and John Minto.

“Hone Harawira needs friends in Parliament to raise a voice for the excluded. Hone is seen as this radical Maori separatist, but why is it radical to feed the kids? To want equal opportunities, or a warrant of fitness on State homes? It’s so sad that these ideas are considered fringe.

“But joining MANA would be disingenuous for me, because I’m so Pakeha! I love people like Annette and John, but they have a different way of doing things than I do. John Minto... what a guy!”

As Miriam sees it, Internet and MANA are two parties with the same vision – but different ways of working and talking, and appealing to different audiences.

“The two parties are speaking to different but vital groups in our society, which have both been excluded. My generation realise that if tangata whenua and the poor are falling behind, we all fall behind. And thirty years of neo-liberalism has only widened the gap.

“Because the Internet Party has quite a different constituency to MANA, it is able to bring my generation into activism on issues where we agree, such as climate change, inequality and mass surveillance. These are the issues that

will define my generation, and the Internet Party is handing us the power and responsibility to have some say in these decisions.

“This alliance brings credibility to both sides. We have a really good relationship and I’m amazed at how well it’s working.”

## The programme of the Internet people

So who exactly are the Internet Party’s constituency? Miriam returns to the day of the rally against the TPPA.

“We were down at the US Consulate [in downtown Auckland], and there were pools of young people wearing purple T-shirts with *Internet Party* on them. It was the first time I’d seen Internet Party marketing and I was surprised.

“I chatted with these young guys, and what they were saying made me think – wow! I had never seen a political party engage with young people like this. One said he had never been interested in politics or voted, but finally there was a party which spoke their language.”

Miriam names concerns around the TPPA, threats to national sovereignty from trans-national corporations and foreign powers, mass surveillance, the Five Eyes data-sharing arrangement, and the unaccountable GCSB (Government Communications Security Bureau) as issues that have brought young IP activists into politics.

“This made me feel – this is what we’ve been waiting for,” Miriam explains. “We are trying to engage and empower those who have been excluded and disaffected by the system, such as the million people who didn’t vote at the last election.”

Isn’t a concern for national sovereignty a bit strange for those devoted to the globalised, borderless world brought by Internet technology? Miriam argues that the real issue is “fear around multinational corporations being able to sue our government if we have laws that are not in their interest. There’s a strong

concern on the Internet around the power and influence that big corporate bodies have – their legal influence, and how they’re able to bankroll politicians.”

Miriam argues, for example, that “Hollywood corporates” bankrolled the campaign of US Vice-President Joe Biden – “which is perhaps one of the reasons America wants Kim Dotcom extradited – they want their money’s worth.”

Miriam agrees with Fightback’s stand against the international copyright regime as a tool of this global corporate dominance (<http://fightback.org.nz/2014/05/20/copyleft-marxism-the-internet-and-publishing/>). “It’s quite crippling on creativity. There’s an idea that Kim Dotcom just wants to be able to steal other people’s content. But we’ve got people in the Internet Party, artists, musicians, who’ve felt excluded and ripped off by these major labels and Hollywood corporates.. And royalties are such a messed-up system.

“Corporations are terrified of being cut out of the money flow for digital content – which is why they’re trying to get Kim with this ridiculous civil case! Our policy is about giving more power to content creators. Even the National Business Review wrote a grudgingly positive review of it!”

## Laila and Kim

What of the leading personalities of the Internet Party? Miriam is upfront about her huge personal admiration for party leader, and former leftist Cabinet minister, Laila Harré.

“I remember as a teenager driving through Auckland, seeing Laila on Alliance billboards and thinking ‘I want to be like her!’”

Ten years later, when Miriam sold Laila raffle tickets at a Green Party fundraiser, she didn’t recognize her teenage idol at first. A week later, Miriam was catching up with Unite union secretary Matt McCarten, “and we all went out for dinner with Laila – this was well before

# MANA Movement

the Internet Party – and it was lovely to talk to her, and I felt happy that I was able to keep up with the conversation! Talking to her husband Barry and her son Sam, I was impressed by how committed a political family they are, and also how personable.

“One thing that some people can’t understand about MANA is that Hone, Annette and John are strong and loud personalities and come from a protest background, which can put people off. In contrast Laila is so softly spoken, and yet she can have people like Paul Henry under her thumb in such a beautiful, graceful manner.”

Miriam also cites Laila’s achievements in the 1999–2002 Cabinet, such as paid parental leave and fighting against New Zealand troop deployment to Afghanistan. “I’m so happy to have her as my boss. Who better to work with and learn from?”

Some people would think that it’s Kim Dotcom, not Laila Harré, who is Miriam’s boss. And the Internet Party founder has a track record of regularly alienating progressive activists with such things as owning a copy of *Mein Kampf* autographed by Hitler himself, “racist day” hijinks while recording his album, and most recently an offensive joke about “killing hookers” on Twitter.

But the Internet Party, Miriam assures us, is very far from being “Kim’s” personal plaything.

“Just because he provides a good chunk of our money doesn’t mean he’s in control. A lot of it is John Key’s spin about Kim ‘buying his way into politics’. And that’s bullshit.

“People think we’ve got all this money, but we’re actually on a very tight budget. It’s not a slush fund that we can dip into whenever.

“Without Kim’s funding or vision for the party – around things like easier access and cheaper internet, taking democracy back to the people, a digital economy rather than relying on agriculture, extractive industries or tourism – we

wouldn’t exist. He’s a generous donor and he’s really committed to the vision. He’s got his own sense of humour, which doesn’t reflect what the rest of us think.

“John Key says he’s just trying to keep himself from being extradited. No Labour justice minister is going to help him with that, so that has nothing to do with the party at all. But the idea for the Internet Party came in part from the deep resentment, hurt, and fear that Kim and his family felt with the raid on his house. It also showed how deep our Government is with the NSA, how we’re just bending over for America.

“Kim has very little to do with the daily running of the party, and doesn’t want to. He polarises people – the 18–24 year olds seem to really like him, while older voters are wary, but then they respond better to Laila or our other candidates. Our policy is not dictated by Kim – the agenda comes from the Internet Party executive, on which Kim has only vote.

“I have no questions as to whether Kim is to be trusted. I’m grateful for the opportunity that we all have – our generation, our country – because of this new party.”

## Online democracy

Miriam is at pains to point out what she believes to be the revolutionary democratic nature of Internet Party online decision-making and policy making.

“A lot of our policy is developed through discussions with our members via Loomio and Google Docs applications. Our environment policy had 300 people working on it. Our health policy was written almost entirely by members – including doctors and pharmacists, as well as ordinary members of the public who visit their GP.

“In contrast, the existing politicians and parties bypass the experts and the people that they represent. Sometimes there’s consultation, but in education there was little to no consultation on

charter schools or national standards, and it’s been a complete cock-up.

“And why are the Government spending all the money from asset sales on roads, or the leaky roof of Parliament, rather than Auckland’s City Rail Link? Let’s talk to the experts, let’s have evidence-based policy.”

One problem with Internet-sourced policy formation is the power that moderators and policy committees have as “gatekeepers” of bottom-up initiatives. But Miriam doesn’t see this as a problem.

“It’s fairly self-moderated at the moment. For a while I thought it was inappropriate to get involved myself, but now candidates are getting more involved. I’ve never seen such a high level of intelligent discussion on an Internet forum – it’s not like YouTube comments! A number of people are very involved and we’d like to get more people involved, but we have to think about how we make that happen.

“Loomio is a discussion forum. If an idea gains traction it will get moved into policy development. But we’re on a very tight time frame, so we have to move a bit faster at the moment. One criticism I’ve heard from some members is they’re not aware exactly how the Incubator material gets turned into policy – so we have to make those links clear.

“So we’re having teething issues, but this is really revolutionary... as far as I know we’re the first party in the world to have this. It’s about bringing democracy back to the people, and making it easy to access.”

## So is the Internet Party internally democratic?

“It’s early days yet. That’s certainly the aim we’re going for, but there’s so little time before the election, so we have had to push things through more quickly than we’d like. As a candidate and leader, I rely on my friends and our voters and members to keep us true to what they





Miriam at the Auckland Party Party

want. If it's democratically decided on, I'll fight for that, even if I don't agree. "The party is owned by everyone. The members have more say than in any other party I've heard of. Candidates talk regularly on our own forum, and the Executive team are very open for us to come and talk to them."

## Openness, conspiracies, and cat ears

Isn't there a problem with being too open? For example, the recent Aotearoa Not For Sale demonstration had to deal with Nazis turning up. Could the Internet Party be "entered" by people with a vile agenda?

"We're really committed to free speech," allows Miriam. "But in the forums if someone comes up with a question about whether we should reject Holocaust deniers as members... Anyone can

join, but the hateful won't get much traction, and the other members will jump on them and slam them in the forums.

"Again, it's self-moderation of the membership. Internet Party members and supporters are not going to let us be taken over by conspiracy theorists or Holocaust deniers."

Miriam warms to the theme of conspiracy theory. "When people put emphasis on things like chemtrails, it totally derails the conversation - it takes away the conversation from real issues. Can we focus on the causes of climate change, or on the manipulation of governments by big business - which sounds like a conspiracy theory, but is actually happening?

"We've got too much to fight for that we can do real, practical things about. People can talk about things like chemtrails or vaccines causing autism, but we're not going to have a policy on things like

that. There are too many real things to be scared of."

Quite opposed to the fear and negativity of conspiracy theory, Miriam hopes to bring hope and "a sense of humour" to New Zealand politics, following the example of Jón Gnarr's "Best Party" in Iceland. "We don't take ourselves seriously, but we take what we do seriously."

Accordingly, part of Internet Party strategy is the big "Party Party" dance events held in various centres, featuring popular hip-hop and rock artists. These are part of a general trend of strong Get Out The Vote activism at this election, including the similar "Rock Enrol" campaign. "We also need ways to get young people to the polls," adds Miriam. "17% of non-voters say that they just couldn't get to the polls."

The night before our interview, Miriam attended Auckland's "Party Party", and her outfit drew comment from *NZ Herald* right-wing gossip columnist Rachel Glucina. "She made some nasty comment about me, saying I was 'inexplicably tarted up with cat ears and whiskers'."

Actually, Miriam was representing Harold, the Internet Party's cat mascot. "And people loved it! The Internet Party is about positive politics - you've got to have fun. Our Party Parties have been off the chain. These musicians really care about getting young people out to vote. We don't care who they're voting for, as long as they're voting."

## Hostile Greens

Miriam is less distressed than put-downs from gossip columnists than she is by the negativity from the party which she still "really loves" - the Greens.

"The Greens have been hating on us. I suspect they don't really get it. We're not trying to take Green Party votes - most Greens I know like what we do, but they're not going to vote for us. The first generation of Green voters are now

# MANA Movement

middle-aged and less radical than they used to be.

"I don't blame the Greens for moving towards a more establishment image if it gets them wider support. But we are trying to bring a more 'radical' element to progressive politics. We don't have political baggage where we have to appeal to older voters."

In contrast to Internet-MANA, whom Rachel argues have realised that "it's not in anyone's interest to be so possessive over your own votes," the Greens seem to sense a threat to their political "brand".

"Russel Norman came out and said that Laila Harré took the Greens' intellectual property for our environment policy. If we have two parties with similar policies, that complement and support each other, isn't that a good thing? That the policy has more power and we can effect change more easily?"

"I'd met [Green Auckland Central candidate] Denise Roche before and she seemed like a nice lady. I went to go and give her a hug and talk to her about Auckland Central – I actually don't want to split the progressive vote, I myself am voting for [Labour's] Jacinda Ardern. But she was really unhappy to see me – quite short with me and pushed me away. That upset me a lot – I can take whatever the Right throw at me, but if we can't work together on the Left, we're through."

However, Miriam hasn't let this make her bitter in return. "I hope the Greens get 15% – a strong coalition including them, Labour and Internet-MANA could be really amazing."

"National are talking about 'the hydra of the Left' and the instability of all these different parties. I completely reject that. We celebrate diversity on the progressive side because that's what democracy is all about. It's unhelpful to bag each other over personal issues."

She also has some advice for Labour:

"In 1935, when the Savage government brought in the welfare state, Labour was

radical, with Ministers who'd spent time in jail, seen as disruptors. Cunliffe could be more progressive, if the Anyone-But-Cunliffe mob would just shut up. We need more disruption."

## Is this the future?

Does Miriam think that the Internet Party could survive without Kim Dotcom? That brings a quick "yes".

"I've put the same question to Kim myself – what happens if you're extradited? Now we have actually gotten big enough, and have enough credibility, to continue without Kim if that happened, touch wood that it doesn't. I have faith that he will continue to support us – not necessarily financially – in the future, but we've got enough momentum that we can keep going."

"As a teacher, I see the power and the passion and the perceptiveness in my my students every day, and in so many political arguments I wish I had the 14 year olds in my class to back me up, because they're so onto it. Young people are excluded from political conversations until they're 18, and then suddenly the political parties are trying to make themselves appealing."

"But it's not about making parties appealing, it's about making the issues relevant, easier to understand, and giving young people something to vote for. Policies aren't aimed at helping the young – they're about maintaining the status quo."

"Young people don't have a tradition of voting so they're ignored, and policies are created for them. We're neglected, so we neglect to take part."

"The Internet Party recognize that our generation has a different way of participating in politics, like sharing a petition on Facebook. That might be armchair activism, but it's as valid as going to vote. Young people think – why should I vote, when politicians lie, break promises, and don't listen to us? And they understand that Labour and National are pretty

much the same thing.

"I wonder, what would have happened if the Labour government hadn't taken us down that neoliberal track 30 years ago? My whole life has been dictated by this bullshit neo-liberal trickle-down theory. But we're young, progressive and educated, and with the advent of the Internet, we can't go back to old models."

"Our world isn't going to be built on nostalgia. We need creative, innovative thinking. We have to reject this old mindset and these old ideas which clearly don't work. People ask us, 'So what's the alternative, a Stalinist government?' But show a little creativity! There are alternatives, and if my generation works together with those other groups in society who don't quite fit in, we could change the world."

"We're about building a new vision, and a new movement, with optimism."

Will the Internet-MANA alliance last past the election? "Everyone is open to that as a possibility. It depends on what the members think, how many MPs we get."

And will Internet-MANA get the 4.5% of the vote necessarily to elect Miriam herself, number 6 on the joint list? "The polls are going up and up, even those based on landlines. What young, poor or Maori people have landlines, anyway?" She looks forward to the big meeting on September 15 in the Auckland Town Hall, with Kim Dotcom and US radical journalist Glen Greenwald, "where Kim will drop a political bombshell about John Key's lying, and just how much we're involved with the American spy network."

For someone who doesn't really want to be a politician – because as a teacher, her occupation gets a lot more respect – Miriam sounds ready and willing to commit to the struggle.

## Coalition governments and real change

*by Mike Treen, General Secretary of UNITE Union. Reprinted from The Daily Blog.*

Can a party that wants fundamental changes in society be a minor part of a coalition government?

My conclusion is no after having been a participant in the Alliance Party's implosion after attempting to do so from 1999-2002 as part of the Labour-led government. But that does not mean that a minor party can't be an effective player in parliament for reforms while continuing to build a movement outside of parliament as well for real change.

Similar disasters befell radical left or Green parties in many countries. In most cases there existed a moderate centrist Labour or social democratic party that had strong support from working people but was committed to the existing system including the system of worldwide alliances with the US-led western imperial ambitions.

Pressure always comes on the smaller more radical party to oppose the more right wing parties and support the "lesser evil" of social democracy. Many working people who either have illusions that their traditional party will make real change, or simply accept – albeit unenthusiastically – the reality of lesser evilism will also often want their party to ally with parties to their left rather than their right in the hope of more progressive policies emerging. It is always worth remembering that not all Labour governments are a lesser evil. It would be hard to argue that was true for the 1984-90 Labour government.

This was true in 1999 in New Zealand. There was genuine enthusiasm when Helen Clark extended the olive branch to the Alliance Party at its conference that year and what was effectively an alternative coalition in waiting won the

election.

Alliance leader Jim Anderton was made deputy prime minister and three others got cabinet posts but the party essentially disappeared from view into Labour's embraces and its policies were seen as essentially the same. The government remained reasonably popular but the Alliance Party's support collapsed in the polls. Technically the party retained the right to differentiate its own position from that of the larger partner while remaining in cabinet but this was rarely invoked. Then when the decision was made to send troops to Afghanistan it provoked a bitter internal fight with the vast majority of the party rejecting the decision by Anderton and a majority of Alliance MP's to support the government's position. The Alliance was eliminated from parliament at the 2002 election and Anderton's faction has simply been absorbed into the Labour Party.

The problem for a genuinely radical party is that it only has minority support and cannot impose any significant policy change on a party committed to the existing system. So long as that system is based on serving the 1% then only small and relatively minor progressive changes are achievable. That was the case for the Alliance which achieved the establishment of Kiwibank and Paid Parental Leave and some labour law reforms despite significant opposition from elements in the Labour Party at the time. But these changes weren't enough to significantly change the position of working people in the country. They weren't enough to give people hope that unemployment could be eliminated, inequality radically reduced, democratic control exerted over the key sectors of the economy.

If the Alliance had remained outside of cabinet it could probably have negotiated for all the changes it actually achieved but remained free to agitate

and mobilise people in the streets for the more radical changes that are needed to make a real improvement to the lives of working people.

The Greens will face a similar challenge if they can achieve a majority able to form a government with Labour after the next election. The Greens have already taken the first significant steps to becoming a "partner" in running the existing system rather than challenging it when they signed up to the ETS as a mechanism to combat climate change. They know that the ETS, or any other market-based mechanism, cannot make any real impact in combating a threat to humanity that has arisen as a consequence of the free market system in the first place.

Protecting the environment and protecting the rights and living standards of the vast majority of people in the world requires the system of capitalism to be superseded. That requires a radical social and political movement that aspires to win a majority in the country – not simply assume the role of "junior partner" to a party that remains fundamentally committed to the current system.

The Mana Movement, which is in my view a system challenging movement, may also face a similar problem if the election is close and Labour and the Greens (and NZ First?) require their vote to form a government. They too will be in a position to negotiate some reforms that benefit the people who support it as part of a negotiated agreement to allow a Labour-led government to be formed. By doing so they will respect the fact that for now they are a minority party and the majority of the people they want to represent have voted for Labour or the Greens. That democratic choice can be respected.

At the same time Mana can retain their freedom of criticism and ability to organise at the grass roots for the



# National politics



Mike Treen holds that the Alliance going into coalition with Labour destroyed the organization. The same question and challenge faces the Mana Movement.

generally timid reforms to go further or against any reactionary policies that such a government will inevitably end up promoting. So long as these parties in government are trying to make a sys-

tem “work” they can’t escape ultimately disappointing their their own supporters because for this system to work it will continue to produce economic crisis, unemployment and environmental

destruction. Movements like Mana can then provide a progressive alternative for those people rather than have that disappointment captured by the right.